

## **SBA's 8(a) Program Offers Sonshine Communications a Bright Future**

For years, Bernadette Morris had a vision to establish a public relations, marketing and advertising firm that would be a leader in its field. This vision was coupled with determination, diligence, and a positive attitude. Faith in her abilities helped realize her dream in 1993 when she established Sonshine Communications, a Christian-based, minority owned and private corporation providing an array of services in the areas of public relations, marketing, advertising and creative development.

Under Bernadette's leadership and guidance, Sonshine has now blossomed into a corporate mainstay, with annual revenues in excess of \$3 million. Located in Miami, Florida, the company is not only achieving success, but striving to be the best. Sonshine Communications is the largest Black owned public relations, marketing and advertising firm in the State of Florida and one of the largest PR firms in the nation.

The firm supplies a host of services in the realm of communications and creative services to corporations, government agencies, non-profit and social service organizations, and churches and ministries. Services include brand marketing, advertising, community outreach, publicity, media relations, creative copywriting, logo and collateral development, multimedia design, web-based design, and audio/ video production which are produced on-site in their own full service production studio.

It was in 1997 when Bernadette set her site on the federal marketplace and turned to the U.S. Small Business Administration's 8(a) business development program for assistance. The SBA's 8(a) Business Development Program, named for a section of the Small Business Act, is a business development program created to help small disadvantaged businesses compete in the American economy and access the federal procurement market.

Sonshine was certified by the SBA as an 8(a) firm in 1998. Sonshine's marketing team researched the federal procurement arena to find out who buys PR related services and targeted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District. With diligence, hard work and a highly creative proposal, Sonshine won the company's first federal contract worth \$ 30,000 to provide public relations and community outreach services. From there, Sonshine learned that the federal sector was productive and pursued other agencies specializing in PR and creative services and won an 8(a) competitive solicitation with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, valued at \$480,000. With each new federal contract, Sonshine was able to hire between three to five new employees. Operating revenues have increased over 400% since joining the 8(a) program. Sonshine's largest contract to date is with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and requires the development of an educational outreach campaign to inform the public about the Corp's efforts to increase awareness of Everglades' restoration.

Since its early and humble beginnings, Sonshine Communications has grown to 27 employees and a client list of over 40 firms. Without a doubt, Bernadette is a visionary leader who is committed to making the difference of a lifetime for her clients and the community. "I credit my company's success to faith in God and my abilities, as well as patience and persistence in pursuing federal contracts," says Bernadette. "I must say, however, that access to the federal contracting arena would have been much more difficult if not for the SBA's 8(a) Program. I am very pleased that we became certified as an 8(a) firm and I encourage all small businesses to consider the opportunities afforded through the SBA."